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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0036

INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE

RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 6722

RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 2515

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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 NEW DELHI 000144

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DEPT FOR SCA/INS, DRL

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PHUM PGOV KIRF SCUL PTER SNAR SOCI PINS IN

SUBJECT: VHP DEMANDS EXPULSION OF "FOREIGN" CHRISTIAN PRIESTS ON NATIONAL SECURITY GROUNDS

REF: A. 08 KOLKATA 002

1B. 07 KOLKATA 388

1C. 07 KOLKATA 386

1D. 07 KOLKATA 385

11. (U) Vote bank politics, along with opposition to Christian missionary activity in the name of national security continue to percolate in the Indian media as Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) leaders met Indian President Pratibha Patil on January 8. The VHP accused the Christian community of starting last month's communal violence in Orissa (refs A, B and D) and demanded the immediate expulsion of foreign priests from the country alleging Naxalite ties and other security risks. (Note: While foreign Christian priests continue to serve, primarily in India's northeast, the majority of priests in Orissa are Indian. The VHP statement is clearly intended to reinforce the VHP's stance that Christianity is a &foreign8 import. End note.) The group also called for a ban on missionary funding from abroad. Reportedly, the President listened patiently to the VHP's concerns and agreed to look further into the issues.

Religion and Security: From Muslim Terrorists to Naxalite Christians

12. (U) During the meeting with President Patil, the VHP alleged a strong link between Christian missionaries and the state's Naxalites/Maoists insurgents (ref C). The VHP sought an immediate ban on the foreign funding to these organizations saying they were a &massive threat8 to the country's security. The Orissa government has ordered a probe into the VHP's allegations. Orissa's NGO groups generally welcomed the decision for a state-run investigation, and are hopeful that credible information will emerge to replace the VHP allegations.

The Sangh Parivar in Coalition Politics

13. (U) The VHP's link between Christian groups and terrorists is not a new strategy. VHP has previously alleged links between India's Northeast Christian majority and Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) -- a claim

they restated during the January 8 meeting with President Patil. However, the BJP, a Sangh Parivar partner, has kept its distance as it selectively moderates its Hindutva stance under the new reality of coalition politics in India. Indeed, the BJP has aligned with non-Congress centrist parties when realpolitik considerations demand. Narendra Modi, the BJP Hindutva poster child, began his Gujarat campaign with a focus on development rather than Hindutva and many commentators believe his sweeping victory was due more to his good governance and development credentials than to his Hindutva stance.

¶4. (SBU) Comment: True to its mission of protecting the Hindu faith, the VHP continuously seeks emotive issues to galvanize the Hindu community. The Ram Setu issue appears to have subsided for now and the Ayodhya Ram temple events happened long ago. Correlating Naxalites with Christians demonstrates the VHP's desire to capitalize on national security sensitivities. The Sangh Parivar has previously utilized this approach, exemplified by linking Indian Muslims with terrorists. Though there are certainly a few Christian Maoist supporters in Orissa, the government of Orissa's move to order an inquiry, even though it is supported by the NGO community, appears to be yet another attempt to shift blame to the Maoists instead of focusing on the real issues of reservations, caste-based oppression and discrimination, conversions, and religious intolerance in the state. Mission has met with the National Human Rights Commission (septel) and leadership from the Orissa state government to discuss Orissa violence and express concern. End Comment.

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¶5. (U) This cable was coordinated with Consulate Kolkata.
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